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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - PRESIDENT BUSH IN EUROPE THE EU, IRAQ, SYRIA AND LEBANON  
PARIS - WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

PRESIDENT BUSH IN EUROPE: THE EU, IRAQ, SYRIA AND LEBANON

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

DESPITE ONGOING ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND EDITORIAL FOCUS ON PRESIDENT BUSH'S VISIT TO EUROPE THERE ARE FEWER FRONT-PAGE PRINT HEADLINES TODAY. FRONT-PAGES ARE DEVOTED TO DOMESTIC SOCIAL ISSUES SUCH AS PLANNED STRIKES COINCIDING WITH THE OLYMPIC COMMITTEE'S TOUR OF PARIS TO DETERMINE ITS POTENTIAL FOR HOSTING THE 2012 OLYMPICS. LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION REMINDS READERS THAT IT HAS BEEN THREE YEARS SINCE THE FRANCO-COLOMBIAN POLITICAL FIGURE, INGRID BETANCOURT, WAS TAKEN HOSTAGE IN COLOMBIA BY THE FARC.

COMMUNIST L'HUMANITE'S FRONT-PAGE ANNOUNCES THAT: "AMERICAN CONSERVATIVES ARE OVERJOYED AT THE IDEA OF HAVING A DRAFT CONSTITUTION THAT WOULD BIND EUROPE" UNDER THE HEADLINE: "THE EUROPE THAT BUSH DREAMS OF." (SEE PART C)

RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO HEADLINES: "BUSH REAFFIRMS THE 'VITAL' ROLE OF NATO" ON ITS FRONT-PAGE AND THE REPORT BY PHILIPPE GELIE PUTS FORWARD THAT: "IF SOME EUROPEANS QUESTION THE USEFULNESS OF THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE, FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER THE END OF THE COLD WAR, GEORGE W. BUSH GAVE THEM AN ANSWER YESTERDAY."

CATHOLIC LA CROIX'S EDITORIALIST OPINES: "GEORGE BUSH'S VISIT TO EUROPE HAS CAREFULLY AVOIDED FRANCE BUT HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO AVOID THE FRENCH PRESIDENT. 'IRAQ IS BEHIND US' THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT DECLARED. INVITING HIS INTERLOCUTORS TO FORGET THEIR PAST SCRUPLES AND FILE THEM IN THE PROFITS AND LOSSES CATEGORY." (SEE PART C)

LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION CALLS PRESIDENT BUSH'S VISIT: "FOUR DAYS TO LISTEN TO EUROPE" BUT ADDS THAT "RATHER THAN LISTENING, BUSH CAME ESPECIALLY TO EXPLAIN HIS POLITICS TO HIS ALLIES WHO ARE INCREASINGLY SKEPTICAL OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE DURING TIMES OF CRISIS WHEN 'FREEDOM IS AT STAKE'. FOR THEIR PART, EUROPEANS UNDERTOOK A HOMERIC BATTLE FOR THE HONOR OF BEING HEARD BY THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT."

THE HEADLINE STORY IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE: "BUSH AND CHIRAC ENJOIN SYRIA TO LEAVE LEBANON" AND THE EDITORIAL UNDERSCORE THE COMMON OBJECTIVE OF THE U.S. AND FRANCE TO PRESSURE DAMASCUS TO PULL ITS TROOPS OUT OF LEBANON, WHILE NOTING THE DIFFERENCE IN APPROACHES. (SEE PART C)

LE MONDE ALSO CARRIES AN OP-ED BY KING ABDALLAH II OF JORDAN ON "A HOPE FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST" "HISTORY HAS SHOWN THAT WORDS ARE ONLY A BEGINNING. TODAY. THE HOPE FOR PEACE MUST BE GIVEN CONCRETE EXPRESSION. THOSE WHO STRIVE FOR PEACE NEED THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND FRANCE HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY BECAUSE OF ITS HISTORIC INFLUENCE AND ITS SENSE OF JUSTICE AND RESPECT FOR OTHER NATIONS."

COMMUNIST L'HUMANITE CARRIES AN INTERVIEW OF PALESTINIAN INTELLECTUAL ELIAS SANBAR ON THE HOPE FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: "WHAT HAS REALLY CHANGED IS PRESSURE FROM THE OUTSIDE, AND FOREMOST FROM THE U.S. THERE HAS BEEN A CLEAR CHANGE IN THE AMERICAN POSITION. THE U.S. HAS A VESTED INTEREST IN PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. GEORGE BUSH WOULD LIKE EUROPE TO BE A PARTNER IN FINDING A SOLUTION AND THIS IS NOT AT ALL TO ARIEL SHARON'S TASTE. IT IS SORT OF A GIFT THAT THE AMERICANS ARE READY TO GIVE THE EUROPEANS SO THAT THEY DECIDE TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN IRAQ."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

PRESIDENT BUSH IN EUROPE  
"TIME TO LEAVE BRUSSELS"

CORRESPONDENT JEAN-BERNARD CADIER TOLD LISTENERS THIS MORNING ON EUROPE 1 RADIO (02/23): "IT IS DEFINITELY TIME FOR PRESIDENT BUSH TO LEAVE BRUSSELS. THE FIRST DAY OF THE SUMMIT WAS MARKED BY GRAND DECLARATIONS AND BIG SMILES, BUT ON

TUESDAY THE SMILES SEEMED TO BE INCREASINGLY FORCED WHEN THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES WERE BROUGHT UP. NOT ONLY WERE DEEP DIVERGENCES STILL APPARENT, BUT IT ALSO APPEARED THAT IT IS ALWAYS THE SAME COUNTRIES THAT STAND UP TO THE U.S."

"THE FRANCO-GERMAN COUPLE WANTS TO IMPOSE ITSELF AGAINST THE U.S."

ALEXANDRINE BOUILHET IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (02/23):

"GEORGE BUSH MET A LOT OF PEOPLE, SAW MANY HEADS OF STATE, NUMEROUS FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTERS, BUT EVERYWHERE HE WENT TWO HEADS STOOD OUT OF THE CROWD, JACQUES CHIRAC AND GERHARD SCHRODER. AND THE MESSAGE THAT WAS ADDRESSED TO PRESIDENT BUSH BY THE EU YESTERDAY WAS IMMINENTLY CLEAR. IF HE WANTS TO STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE, AS HE SAYS HE DOES, HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GET AROUND FRANCE AND GERMANY."

"GEORGE W. BUSH, GODFATHER OF EUROPE DESPITE HIMSELF"

ALAIN DUHAMEL OPINED IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (02/23):

"GEORGE BUSH HAS DISCOVERED THE EUROPEAN UNION. HE HAS OBVIOUSLY NOT GIVEN UP THE IDEA OF CONVERTING IT TO HIS WAY OF THINKING. HE DEFINITELY INTENDS TO USE NATO AS THE TOOLBOX OF THE PENTAGON. HE WOULD LIKE TO SWAY THE EUROPEANS TO GET ON BOARD WITH HIS STRATEGY FOR THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST. HE CONTINUES TO PURSUE THE DREAM OF A UNIVERSAL AMERICAN LEADERSHIP. NONETHELESS, WHILE GEORGE BUSH 1 IGNORED EUROPE OR TRIED TO BREAK IT BY TREATING IT AS THOUGH IT WERE A DECLINING CONTINENT. GEORGE BUSH 2 HAS REDISCOVERED EUROPE, HAS PAID TRIBUTE TO IT AND FORESEES TO TREAT IT SOME DAY LIKE A REAL PARTNER. BUSH 1 BROUGHT ABOUT THE BIRTH OF A EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINION, BUSH 2 INCITES EUROPE TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY."

"EUROPE EXISTS: BUSH SAW IT"

PIERRE LAURENT IN COMMUNIST L'HUMANITE (02/23): "IN SHORT, THE U.S. LIKES EUROPE ESPECIALLY WHEN IT BEHAVES ITSELF AND IS ALIGNED WITH ITS POSITIONS. WITH THIS IN MIND IS IT DIFFICULT NOT TO SEE THE FINAL DECLARATION AT THE NATO SUMMIT AS A TROUBLING LIMITATION OF EUROPE'S MARGIN OF MANEUVER? WITH THE CONFLICT IN IRAQ CONTINUING AND THE AMERICAN SWORD OF DAMOCLES HANGING OVER SYRIA AND IRAN. IS IT REALLY THE RIGHT TIME FOR EUROPE TO HAND ITS FATE OVER TO GEORGE W. BUSH?. EUROPE SHOULD HAVE ANOTHER DESTINY THAN TO BE THE ARMED GUARD DOG OF AMERICAN SECURITY POLICIES."

"CHIRAC WANTS TO BELIEVE IN BUSH"

MYRIAM LEVY IN POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE PARISIEN (02/23):

"YESTERDAY THE EUROPEANS APPEARED TO BE GIVING GEORGE BUSH A REMEDIAL COURSE BY IMPOSING ON HIM NO LESS THAN TEN SPEECHES TO EXPLAIN WHAT IS EUROPE!"

"FORGET IRAQ?"

BRUNO FRAPPAT WRITES IN CATHOLIC LA CROIX (02/23): "TO SAY THAT 'IRAQ IS BEHIND US' IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THAT NOTHING EVER HAPPENED. THAT WE SHOULD SIMPLY FORGET THAT THE LIES CONCERNING THE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION THAT CONSIDERABLY UNDERMINED GEORGE W. BUSH'S CREDIBILITY. HAD HE EXPRESSED JUST ONE OUNCE OF REMORSE ON THIS SUBJECT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A POSITIVE STEP. BUT WE SHOULD NOT DREAM TOO MUCH. IN THESE TIMES OF BENEVOLENT DOMINATION, THE LEAST WE CAN ASK OF THOSE WHO ASK FOR OUR FRIENDSHIP IS TO LET THEIR FRIENDS BE FREE."

"HOPE FOR BEIRUT"

THE UNSIGNED EDITORIAL IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE (02/23):

"[BUSH AND CHIRAC] HAVE A COMMON STANCE ON THE ISSUE OF SYRIA AND LEBANON. HOWEVER THE U.S. IS MORE CONCERNED WITH PUTTING PRESSURE ON SYRIA IN VIEW OF A NEW GEOPOLITICAL ORDER IN THE MIDDLE EAST WHILE FRANCE IS CONCERNED, ABOVE ALL, WITH RE-ESTABLISHING LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE." LEACH